



Monumental City Bar Association

P.O. Box 1502
Baltimore, Maryland 21203

February 11, 2020

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Maryland House of Delegates
Ways and Means Committee
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, Maryland

SUPPORT HB0568 TO IMPROVE VOTING ACCESS

Dear Members of the Maryland House of Delegates:

My name is Aaron DeGraffenreidt and I am the President of Monumental City Bar Association (MCBA), headquartered in Baltimore, Maryland. **I write on behalf of our organization to support House Bill 0568 to improve access to voting for eligible voters.**

Felony Disenfranchisement is the act of barring an individual convicted of a felony from voting in a political election. This act extends an individual's punishment far beyond the time they are incarcerated. This is particularly true when history has revealed many instances of unequal and inequitable creation and application of the law on minority communities. Let us not forget the impact of disparate sentencing of crack cocaine versus powder cocaine on minorities. Even as of today's date mandatory sentencing for use of hand guns in the commission of crime does not exist for the use of shot guns used in the commission of crime. A 2013 report from the ACLU of Maryland found that Black people were arrested more than twice the rate as White people for marijuana related cases every year from 2001-2010. The list of examples for these inequities of the law fill volumes of extensive scholarly research and far exceed the time and space we have here.

Maryland has made strides in an attempt to reverse the impact of this multigenerational injustice. In 2007, the Maryland General Assembly repealed its lifetime voting ban. In 2016, the Maryland General Assembly eliminated the voting ban for individuals on parole or probation allowing people to vote once they complete their sentences, restoring voting rights to more than 40,000 returned citizens. In



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addition, current Maryland law allows individuals detained in a correctional facility awaiting trial or incarcerated solely for a misdemeanor the right to vote. Before the Maryland General Assembly expanded the right to vote, our state shamefully upheld vestiges of the Jim Crow era by banning people convicted of certain crimes from voting. We encourage this legislative body to continue the work of undoing the damage these practices caused.

Creating equity in voting rights law is the first step. Actively educating and connecting the historically disenfranchised to the democratic process is the necessary second. Without education one might proceed as if the voting laws have not changed. In fact, this is the reality for many in the target population who do not know they have the right to participate in our democracy. House Bill 0568 changes that and distances Maryland from more regressive states like Alabama where state officials openly display their apathy for formerly incarcerated voters¹.

This bill creates a mechanism to breathe life into the laws the Maryland General Assembly passed to re-enfranchise voters. The proposed legislation will require the Board of Elections and the Department of Public Safety to ensure access to voter registration, absentee voter ballots, or mail-in ballots. This bill will ensure that returning citizens are informed of their voting rights by requiring the Department of Parole and Probation to provide them with voter registration forms including written information distributed by the Board of Elections on the importance and the mechanics of voting. These steps will demonstrate to returning citizens that they are full members of our society and reduce the stigma they encounter.

Monumental City Bar Association is the oldest Black bar association in the state of Maryland. Founded in 1935, Monumental City Bar Association was created to advocate for Black attorneys and judges and to speak out in the interest of the Black community at large. Our members have made significant contributions to the legal community in Baltimore City and throughout the state of Maryland. Our membership includes those working in the judiciary, state and federal government, law firms, academia, corporate and non-profit organizations.

Sincerely,

Aaron DeGraffenreidt
Monumental City Bar Association President 2019-2020
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¹ “I don’t care how many we’ve registered who used to be in prison...” Alabama Secretary of State John H. Merrill *More Ex-Prisoners Can Vote – They Just Don’t Know It*, [The Marshall Project](#) (August 1, 2018).